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## CURRENT OPINION

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### A Modern View of Faith

An earnest endeavor to clear away the mists from the word "faith" in present-day nomenclature is made in the *Reformed Church Review* for January. The writer is E. L. Coblenz, of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and the article appears under the heading, "What Is Faith?" The customary use in the Christian ministry of certain great words in the history of religion without any clear and precise knowledge of their conceptual background leads Mr. Coblenz to attempt a sharpening of the modern ideas subsumed under one of these regnant words, namely, "faith." Viewed negatively, the limits of faith may be distinguished in five different realms:

1. Faith is not credulity. The two are disparate and distinct. "Credulity is the accepting of statements or conclusions on slender or insufficient evidence." The growing child, leaving behind the pleasing Santa Claus fiction, is losing, not faith, but credulity. "Any unthinking, easy acceptance of statements without effort or rational ground for verification, no matter how comforting, is credulity and not faith."

2. Faith is not superstition. Superstition is constructed from mental concepts interpenetrated by distinct awe-inspiring, even terrifying, potency, and is labeled as supernatural activity. Many times this has been misnamed faith. What are the visits to shrines for cures, the kissing of the bones of saints, but gross superstitions, yet all clad in the garments and marching under a banner inscribed "Faith"? "Spain spends more money for candles on her altars than for public education." Some hold that a mild form of superstition is allowable, for the reason of its conserving a sense of the mysterious so necessary to the perpetuation of religion. Yet is not the mystery of the stars of infinitely greater

worth to the intelligent observer than their mystery to the savage who lives in terror of their supposed malignity? "Life must pass from the superstition of the charm to faith in the normal order."

3. Faith is not a blind expectancy of supernatural benefactions. One of the most widespread and most dangerous delusions is that which leads people to hold faith as looking for help from an absentee God in times of extreme emergency, doubly dangerous because reckoned so religious. People can readily quote Scripture about the "mustard seed" and "removing mountains" to show that miraculous provision of the desirable as necessary may be expected.

4. Faith is not a disqualified alternative for work. Those who make use of such a combination display their adherence to faith as some sort of respectable unreality that cannot, after all, be depended upon to operate.

5. Faith is not assent to creedal systems. Many talk about this or that "faith" in connection with different denominations or with wider divisions of Christendom. The great ecumenical creeds, "products of orientalism, of Greek metaphysics, of Roman legalism, of Jewish Messianism, of Christian apocalypticism, all woven around Jesus, by the circumstances of the decadent monarchy and ascending hierarchy, accompanied by all the subtle influences of political intrigue and desire for supremacy, have been ascribed a heavenly origin and declared to have been handed down to earth as the full and final truth of eternity and the test of faith evermore. To accept the faith means to affirm our allegiance to, and belief in, these propositions, not because we have found them true but because they are to be believed upon authority." Even if such facts as lie behind these intellectual formulations have irrefragable historicity,

assent to them is not an act of faith. Belief in the historical data concerning the discovery, settlement, and development of this country does not constitute faith in America or its president. Obscurity of thinking here has evoked most of our theological conflicts, creating agony of soul for really religious people.

Stated positively: "Faith is the venture of life under the impact of the reality and worthfulness of the spiritual world and the moral order." It is the acknowledgment of God as the ideal achieving spirit ever operating in and through the human spirit. Its potency is measured, not so much in intensity of belief as in the reality and greatness of the object of that belief. He has Christian faith who responds to the "pressure of the truth and righteousness of Jesus upon his soul." The reality to which faith responds is evidenced in actual living. "The Bible, though supremely valuable, is no substitute for a speaking God." Rather is it an aid to our own personal discovery of God.

In the realm of the rational two fundamental assumptions are made: (1) the trustworthiness and normality of human mentality, and (2) the reliability of the impress of the world phenomena upon the mind. A thoroughly rational world is certainly a greater evidence of a rational spirit than the capricious, irrational world of the past, into which the absent deity broke on special occasions and in miraculous ways. Immanence and transcendence are not to be understood in a locative fashion as being mutually opposed. Viewed qualitatively, the immanence of transcendence can be predicated of God in the world.

In the realm of the spiritual there is the underlying assumption that the ideals of beauty and goodness and the feeling that ugliness and badness are abnormal are reliable. Our moral senses evidence, not the distinct presence of a God who fashioned them, but they themselves register the actual

presence of that spiritual personality. In venturing our lives with utter abandon on the fundamental assumption of the purposive character of life-processes moving toward a kingdom of good-will we are doing no more than does science when it builds upon the assumption that the universe and man are rational. Properly understood, there is no such thing as the so-called conflict between science and religion. Each is a great faith. Science and supernaturalism are at odds in their methodology. The two are really sciences, and the war is between normal causation and abnormal intervention. Religion has nothing vitally to do with either. A conflict that is significant is found between naturalism and religion, a war of purposes, not methods. The one holds the universe simply as a big machine, ethics as a makeshift of expediency, and Christianity as a delusion. Over against this "stands Jesus and the real Christianity with its sublime, heroic, and daring venture of life upon such ideal interests as unselfishness, beauty, brotherhood, the kingdom of good-will, with the assurance of worthfulness of these interests and the conviction of a spiritual order regnant in the universe."

### **The Alcohol Incubus**

After twenty-five years of personal experience as a medical man, Dr. E. L. Fisk reaches the conclusion that "alcohol is a destructive force, wholly evil in its total effects." He writes on "Alcohol and Human Efficiency" in the February number of the *Atlantic Monthly*. Reference is made to a previous article where data were produced to demonstrate alcohol, even in small regular doses, as provoking a depressing and degenerative effect. Recent experiments in the nutrition laboratory serve to confirm the earlier findings. The subjects were carefully selected, temperate users of alcohol, "apparently free from any peculiar susceptibility or resistance to its effects."

The alcohol was administered in two separate doses, 'A', or 30 cubic centimetres, and 'B,' or 45 cubic centimetres, well diluted and its flavor disguised in various ways to avoid the effect of suggestion." Experiments were made on these subjects to discover the effect of alcohol upon (1) *reflex mechanism*, (a) simple, in the patellar reflex, or knee-jerk, (b) more complex, in eye and speech reaction to sudden visual stimuli, and (c) highest reflex, in the free association of ideas, the experiments involving a word spoken by the operator and a response word, the first occurring word, spoken by the subject; (2) *power to memorize*; (3) *sensitivity to electric stimulation*; (4) *reciprocal innervation in certain eye and finger movements*. The results of such careful and exhaustive experimentation revealed that "along with depression and retardation and decreased irritability of a number of related neuro-muscular processes is found an acceleration of the pulse, giving a clear indication of decreased organic efficiency, as a result of moderate doses of alcohol. The 'brake' is taken off the heart, but there is no direct stimulation of the heart-muscle." This sets aside the alcoholic tradition—supported by previous scientific investigations—that there is even partial stimulation of functions, either muscular or organic. Any supposed evidence of alcoholic stimulus is explained on the grounds of autogenic reinforcement. Moreover, the alcoholic depression is not, like sleep, a conservative process because of the increased heart action. The exuberant activity attendant upon healthy youth is due to the hormones circulating in the blood. Alcohol is used to take the place of these. It is an imitative hormone and places the human organism at a disadvantage in the struggle for existence.

### **Immortality in the Light of Today**

In the *London Quarterly Review* for January Rev. I. Gamble discusses "Immortality and Christian Belief" in a very

stimulating and informing style. For the writer belief in personal survival after death is inseparable from all the phases of historic Christianity. The early propagandists of the Christian gospel outclassed the Isis or Mithraic protagonists because they based the hope of immortality upon experiences of a *real historical*, rather than a *distant mythical*, figure. Although later the thought about salvation itself gave place to debate as to the conditions of salvation, the transcendental hopes and fears in connection therewith have always been the motives of appeal. This tacit assumption lying behind every Christian creed is today assailed by various forces making for its impotency or its entire disappearance from religious thought.

Ruskin is quoted with approval as holding that, practically, the average man is moved little by considerations of eternal life. Hope of any kind is supported largely by the imagination. For many years past the supports of popular imagination have one by one suffered removal by the merciless inquiry of the critical reason. The process has gone on until now, although death retains its fascination, the authoritative and traditional view of it is met by frank incredulity at every angle. The following have served to modify conceptions of the future life:

1. "The disappearance of the sharp division of mankind into good and bad." The traditional conception of a multitude of men, inspired by a common hope, looking for a blessed future life is shattered by the intense individuality which seeks its own heaven and disdains a heaven of the wider portrayal.

2. Changed views of punishment. The remedial theory of punishment made for easy belief in purgatory or even hell. It is coming to be perceived that punishment, remedial or retributive, is a part of the earthly paraphernalia and cannot properly be predicated of any future existence.

3. Changed views of the Bible and its inspiration. "Our present interpretation

of the New Testament has the effect of substituting earth for heaven as the center of interest." Its practical outcome is seen in the identification of the hopes of the social reformer with the tidings of the Christian gospel in a call for an *earth* regenerated.

4. The loss of vitality in the Easter message for the world. The figure of the deathless Lord, eminently satisfying to the believer with its promise of immortality, finds and leaves the doubting world incredulous and unconvinced concerning the future life.

Even in the face of such facts it cannot be argued, in spite of Frederick Myer's belief that science is destroying the citadels of religion, that the disappearance of orthodoxy, so-called, means the vanishing of hope in a future life. Apart from reasoning processes this confidence arose, continued, and will persist, expressed in varying and wavering images mayhap, but strongly vital to human striving. "Faith is fidelity to the soul's best instincts." It leads us to the sacrifice of life itself for the cause of right and honor. Such a claim God will not repudiate.

#### Science and Future Existence

Another approach to the subject of life and its continued duration is made in the January number of the *Nineteenth Century*, by H. F. Wyatt. Writing under the title, "If a Man Die, Shall He Live Again?" Mr. Wyatt, in a survey of futuristic beliefs from earliest times to the present, concludes, as does the writer in the aforementioned article, that the ordinary individual, in England at least, is largely devoid of any belief in God or the future life. Yet with the decay of orthodox Christianity, and its consequent loss of vital future hope for the uneducated, there is seen the rise of science with a new message for the life beyond. "Amongst men of science dogmatic negation is no longer the dominant note." Rather is that note wonder, and 'wonder'—as Carlyle once wrote—"is the basis of worship." Morality fundamentally

rests on two related propositions: "Belief in a Power behind phenomena making for righteousness, and belief in the possibility of the survival of personality after death." Unless these two related beliefs are conserved, a nation as a civilization faces decay and swift death. Apart from what is called revelation, and apart also from "spiritualism," it is possible to throw light upon these two problems.

The thinking mind subsumes under the term "God" attributes of unity, infinite energy, infinite mind, infinite righteousness. Modern science demonstrates beyond contradiction the unity of the Power which constitutes the universe. The flame of hydrogen is discovered alike in the farthest stellar nebulae, the sun, and in our planet. Not only is the element identical throughout, but its messenger, light, is "as a myriad of waves in a sea linking the universe together." Man is in physical contact with every star. Light is a disturbance in something now called ether, a tremendous physical reality.

The existence and the concomitants of light establish proof of the unity of energy. Light-waves have been traveling from the sun—at the rate of over 180,000 miles every second and of a minuteness comparable to an atom, i.e., one ten-millionth of a millimeter—ever since there were suns, and give promise of operation as long as the aforesaid entities endure. Further proof of the unity of the universe is found in the modern discoveries concerning ether. Now we know that this physical substance renders such phrases as "the void of space" anachronistic. The atom itself is a solar system within whose relatively immense expanse rotate ions, or electrons, with unthinkable velocity. This so-far-known ultimate unit of matter, the electron, has a linear dimension of about a hundred-thousandth of an atom, and is a vortex or a stress in the ether which itself forms the basis of all matter and the plenum of all space. The following are ascertained facts

with respect to ether: (1) It really exists. (2) It has physical powers and limitations, being capable of transmitting light vibrations at a measurable rate of speed. (3) In transmitting light it also transmits the forces which cause light, namely, electricity and magnetism. (4) It is the medium by which gravitation operates. (5) In mediating gravitation it gives evidence of possessing remarkable potency. (6) It is a frictionless liquid; this is proved by the fact that the material bodies of the universe move through it "without the slightest appreciable trace of retardation." (7) In transmitting light it shows itself to be moving at an identical velocity with light. Following the labors of such scientists as Faraday, Clerk-Maxwell, Sir J. J. Thomson, Lord Kelvin, and Sir Oliver Lodge, it is seen that the theologians no longer monopolize the doctrine holding to a unity of Power behind all phenomena. Corporeally we are constructed of aggregates of electrons, these vortices in the ether, and are parts of a unal energy operating in the infinity of space and time. Thus two attributes of God, i.e., unity and infinite energy, are established as certain facts by modern science. A further discussion of the subject in the next number of the magazine is promised by the author.

### **The Ethics of Christianity**

Can the development of morality express itself on any higher levels than those on which rests the ethical teaching of Jesus and Paul? Such a question is answered with a decided negative by Professor H. H. Scullard, whose article on "The Originality and Finality of Christian Ethics" appears in the *Hibbert Journal* issued for the first quarter of the present year. The author accepts the picture of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel as normative for all that is known of Christianity's founder, and from this basis arrives at eminently satisfying conclusions regarding Christian ethical standards.

The claim of the theosophist, or of the rationalist, or even of some Christian pro-

fessors of comparative religion, that nothing new is found in early Christian ethics rests on a superficial examination. It is admitted that this teaching must be similar to the earlier ethic in order to be understood and accepted. Also the claims of Jesus that he was "the Son of God and the Son of man" would have been interfered with by an entirely new ethic. As the Son of God he came to continue and not to annul the divine education of the race. "My Father worketh hitherto and I work." As the Son of man it was inevitable that his teaching should gather up all the best of earlier moral deliverances. Yet another reason for the opinion that Christian ethics contains no novelties is found in the fact that the exponents of such an opinion take a narrow view of the scope of that ethics. They take only the Sermon on the Mount, or mere fragments of this, as representing the entire purview. Rightly understood, "even the whole of the Synoptist teaching is only a first draft, a kind of interim ethic, eternal as every word of God is, but awaiting its final interpretation, expression, and completion in the glorification of the Teacher and the opening of the Kingdom to all believers."

Although the first century of Christendom was a notable era in the mobilization of resources on the part of world religions and philosophies, and although Palestine cannot have escaped the effect of this worldwide interest in religion and morals, yet those who have studied the subject appear least inclined to rest upon a theory of extensive borrowing on the part of the disciples. Nor can it be held that Christian ethics evolved from Jewish morality. The different theories that Jesus is a continuation of Jewish prophetism, Essenism, legalistic prophetism, or apocalypticism do not explain the Christian ethics. The same word has not the same meaning to Laotzu and Aristotle and Jesus. "His teaching . . . was the outcome of His own moral insight, the spontaneous overflow of His own perfect nature."

The finality of Christian ethics follows naturally upon the recognition of its originality. "Though this cannot be proved, there are many reasons for believing it." The continuous, universal character of the standards set up by Jesus cannot be ignored. Other moralities are partial and local, while this is complete and universal. Science says that Jesus, in connecting the moral life with the idea of the Absolute, with God, has taken ethics out of the realm of experience, destroying its scientific character and rendering impossible its finality. Against this the father of inductive sciences is quoted as admitting that "a great part of the moral law is higher than the light of nature can aspire to." Christian ethics is the ethics of the resurrection life and as such can never change. "It has reached its apogee."

The objection to Christian ethics that, belonging to another order, it cannot meet the entire requirements of this, the temporal, misses the mark altogether. A code of ethics anticipating every world-event and vicissitude would leave man in the bonds of legalism. Biological moralists like Deshumbert, Novicow, and Nietzsche in their failures have shown that no species of alchemy can efficiently "extract morals out of physics or love and duty out of life and force." "There is one description of Christian morals which differentiates it alike from the legalism of the ethnic religions and from the non-moral view of life suggested by modern biology, which reveals the originality and guarantees the finality of Christian ethics. It is "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus."

#### **The Beast of Revelations**

The Orient has the honor of presenting another to the already numerous identifications of the beast with seven heads and ten crowns. The new interpretation is made by a famous Japanese astrologer named

Kumamoto. He has held several government positions, among which was the post of Director of the Higher Commercial School of Nagasaki. He has made interesting prophecies, one of which, in 1912, related to the beginning of the present European war. And he now prophesies the end of the war before the end of the year.

His prophecies are given in full in the magazine called *Jitsuggo-no-Nippon*, or *Industrial Japan*, and they are summarized in the *Herald of Asia*, an English weekly of Tokyo. He expects that, about August, Germany will begin to succumb, and that the allied armies will appear at the gates of Berlin by November. And he bases his prediction upon the Bible! He puts it as follows:

The present European war was prophesied in St. John's Revelations. The beast with seven heads and ten crowns is the Kaiser himself. The ten crowns mean ten monarchies or duchies composing the German Empire, while the seven heads are none other than the seven kings of the Hohenzollern dynasty. The beast is represented in the book as running around the world for three days and a half; but since a day in the Heaven means a year on earth, this prophesies the continuance of the present war for three years and a half, during which time Germany is destined to devastate the world with her inhuman force. The Revelation states that Satan was given power to act for forty-two months. All these statements indicate that the present war will continue forty-two months, or, in other words, the war will end between August and November of this year.

There is a little mistake in Mr. Kumamoto's arithmetic; for from August, 1914, to August, 1917, is only three years, or thirty-six months, and the additional six months would carry the war over into 1918. But that is a small point of lower criticism! The main point is that of the new commentary on that scriptural passage, the new exegesis of a much-disputed question.